

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

ACDA-07 SAJ-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /068 W

----- 118435

R 131602Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9428

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 13245

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MILI, IT

SUBJECT: THE FUTURE OF MAAG ITALY

1. WHILE THE FUTURE OF MAAGS CONTINUES DEBATED ON THE SHORES OF THE POTOMAC, HERE ON THE TIBER OUR HOSTS HAVE SOME IDEAS ON THEIR OWN.

2. ON THE COURSE OF CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE ON THE REIMBURSEMENT OF MAAG COSTS FOR 1975, IT WAS CLEAR THAT OUR INTERLOCUTORS WERE FOLLOWING THE TREND OF CONGRESSIONAL ACTION ON MAAGS WITH MORE THAN PASSING INTEREST. THE ITALIAN VIEW OF THE MAAG AS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED EMERGES FROM THE CONVICTION THAT:

1) THE COST OF OPERATING THE MAAG (NOW REIMBURSED BY THE GOI) IS GREATLY OUT OF PROPORTION TO THE BENEFITS ACCRUING TO ITALY;

2) THE EXISTENCE OF ANY "MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND ADVISORY GROUP" IN ITALY IS ANACHROMISTIC AND OFFENSIVE TO THE DIGNITY OF THE ITALIAN ARMED FORCES.

NONETHELESS, THOSE IN THE GOI CONCERNED WITH RELATIONALIZING THE "MAAG PROBLEM" BELIEVE THAT SOME U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IS NECESSARY IN ROME TO CARRY OUT TO FUNCTIONS THEY SEE AS ESSENTIAL TO THEIR INTERESTS. THOUGH THESE FUNCTIONS

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HAVE NOT BEEN CLEARLY SPECIFIED, THEY INCLUDE OPERATIONS

IN SUCH AREAS AS TRAINING, FMS SALES AND THE DISPOSITION
OF EXCESS PROPERTY OF MAP ORIGIN.

3. HERETOFORE THE MOD HAS PAID ALL THE ADMINISTRATIVE
COSTS OF THE MAAG (LAST YEAR AMOUNTING TO ABOUT \$400 THOUSAND)
WHICH ARE MORE THAN HALF THE TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF THE MAAG
IF U.S. SALARIES ARE INCLUDED. IN THE FUTURE INCARNATION
OF THE MAAG AS A "LIAISON GROUP", IT IS NOT LIKELY THAT THE
ITALIANS WOULD EASILY AGREE TO COVERING ANY COSTS OF ITS
ADMINISTRATION, THE BURDEN OF WHICH THEY SEE AS DEVOTED TO
MEETING U.S. REQUIREMENTS. UNDER THEBEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES,
THE ITALIANS MIGHT BE PERSUADED TO MAKE A TOKEN FIGLEAF
PAYMENT TO COVER ANY CONGRESSIONAL EXPECTATION THAT MAY
DEVELOP.

4. MEANWHILE WE ARE LEFT WITH THE PROBLEM OF COLLECTING
FOR THREE QUARTERS OF 1976. AND IF WE HOPE TO OBTAIN MOD
ACCEPTANCE OF THE IDEA OF PAYING SOME SMALL PART OF THE
COST OF THE POST-OCTOBER 1 LIAISON GROUP, IT WOULD IN OUR
VIEW BE PRUDENT TO BROACH THE SUBJECT AT THE SAME TIME
THAT WE ARE DISCUSSING THE BILLS FOR 1975-76. ALL OF
THIS SHOULD HAPPEN WELL BEFORE THE OCTOBER 1 TARGET DATE
FOR THE NAME CHANGE AT WHICH TIME (AND THEREAFTER
INCREASINLY) THE ITALIANS WILL LIKELY ASSUME THEY HAVE
BEEN AUTOMATICALLY RELIEVED OF THE MAAG BURDEN AND THAT SUPPORT
OF THE PHOENIX LIAISON GROUP IS SOLELY OUR RESPONSIBILITY. THERE
IS SOME URGENCY THEREFORE IN HAVING WASHINGTON GUIDANCE
FOR A DISCUSSION OF THE SPECIFICS WITH THE ITALIANS IN
EARLY SEPTEMBER AFTER THEIR AUGUST VACATION PERIOD. INDEED,
THE MOD HAS ASKED EMBASSY AND MAAG REPRESENTATIVES TO
ATTEND A MEETING WITH THEM AND THE MFA THE FIRST WEEK
IN SEPTEMBER TO DISCUSS REIMBURSEMENT FOR 1975 AND 1976 AS
WELL AS WAYS IN WHICH THE MAAG CAN BE ALTERED IN FORM,
NAME AND NUMBERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH "THE PRESENT REALITY
OF THE U.S./ITALIAN RELATIONSHIP".

5. THERE IS URGENCY TOO IN RECEIVING SPECIFIC DECISIONS
ABOUT THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME IN ORDER TO PERMIT THE
PRESENT MEMBERS OF THE MAAG GROUP TO MAKE PERSONAL PLANS.
INEVITABLY, MORALE AMONG THE MAAG STAFF, AMERICAN AND
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ITALIAN, HAS SUFFERED. PROLONGED UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE
FUTURE CAN ONLY DEGRADE MORALE AND EFFECTIVENESS EVEN
FURTHER. A RIF AMONG ITALIAN EMPLOYEES WOULD SEEM ALMOST
UNAVOIDABLE BUT WE CAN PERHAPS EASE THE PROCESS AND
CONCEIVABLY FIND OTHER EMPLOYMENT FOR THOSE TO BE RELEASED
IT THE DIMENSIONS OF THE REDUCTION CAN BE IDENTIFIED EARLY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY ADVISERS, MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ROME13245
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760312-0929
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760855/aaaabvuf.tel
Line Count: 114
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <03 MAY 2004 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <26 AUG 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE FUTURE OF MAAG ITALY
TAGS: MASS, MILI, IT, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006